

POOL EQUIPMENT COMPANY WADES DEEPER INTO LEAN MANUFACTURING

ABOUT AQUA CREEK PRODUCTS. For Aqua Creek Products, building pool lifts and aquatic access equipment isn't just about manufacturing—it's about making the water accessible to everyone. From their shop in Missoula, Montana, this family-owned company has spent more than two decades creating ways for people of all abilities to enjoy the freedom and health benefits of swimming and recreation.

Founded in 2002, Aqua Creek is best known for its pool lifts and aquatic access solutions, including pool-access wheelchairs. Thanks to this spirit of innovation—and rising demand for ADA-compliant pool equipment—Aqua Creek has doubled its sales over the past five years and expanded its workforce to nearly 70 employees.

THE CHALLENGE. But growth also brought new challenges: maintaining quality, reducing lead times, and ensuring their expanding workforce had the skills to succeed.

"We knew we were at a turning point," recalls CEO Krystal Guilhemotonia. "Our products change lives, and we wanted our processes to reflect the same commitment to excellence." That's when Aqua Creek partnered with the Montana Manufacturing Extension Center (MMEC) to deepen its Lean manufacturing expertise.

MEP CENTER'S ROLE. In a show of deep commitment, **eight members of Aqua Creek's production team dedicated 40 intensive hours each—more than 320 combined hours—to advanced Lean training.** With guidance from MMEC Senior Business Advisor Steve Dybdal, they immediately applied new skills, using techniques such as value stream mapping, 5S, batch reduction, plant layout, and total productive maintenance.

Instead of classroom theory alone, training sessions were followed by hands-on implementation workshops. Together, the team developed current and future value stream maps, providing a clear roadmap for prioritizing and executing improvement opportunities.

This focus on continuous improvement didn't end with Lean training. Building on the momentum of these initiatives and with support from MMEC, Aqua Creek successfully **achieved ISO 9001:2015 certification**, reinforcing its commitment to world-class quality and operational excellence.

The results have been both measurable and meaningful. Aqua Creek has already increased throughput, streamlined processes, and laid the foundation for lasting improvements in quality and efficiency.

More importantly, the project has sparked a cultural shift. While the initial Lean training focused on eight members of the production team, the benefits have spread across the broader workforce as new practices and insights are shared on the shop floor. Employees are now equipped not only to spot inefficiencies but also to confidently lead change. And the numbers (below) speak for themselves.

The impact doesn't stop at Montana's borders. With Aqua Creek products now reaching nearly 60 countries, each improvement made in Missoula carries global weight. From local pools to international resorts, communities worldwide are experiencing the benefits of equipment built with Montana craftsmanship and Lean excellence.

Looking ahead, Aqua Creek is not slowing down. The company is already preparing to send another eight-member team through Lean training, ensuring continuous improvement is deeply embedded in its culture.

RESULTS



\$1,785,000 increased/retained sales



1 increased/retained jobs



\$81,000 in new investment



\$128,000 in cost savings

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"This experience has been about more than processes—it's about empowering our people. The MMEC partnership gave us the tools and confidence to keep improving, so we can continue doing what we do best: helping people of all abilities access the water."

-Krystal Guilhemotonia, Aqua Creek CEO